An Archaeological Survey of Southton Park Bexar County, Texas

by

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Abstract

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants conducted an archeological survey of the approximately 80 acres of the Southton Park Survey for Certainty Engineering & Consulting, Inc. The assessment consisted of a pedestrian survey and seven backhoe trenches strategically placed in each soil zone and topographic feature to test for buried cultural deposits. No evidence of prehistoric or historic sites was found on the property. No further archaeological investigations are recommended

INTRODUCTION

Abasolo Archaeological Consultants conducted an archaeological survey of the approximately 80 acres of the Southton Park tract for Certainty Engineering & Consulting, Inc. at the request of the City of San Antonio. The survey was carried on July 9, 2007 by Harry Shafer and Thomas Hester. Backhoe services were provided by Frost GeoSciences of Helotes, Texas. The survey was carried out in accordance with the "Archeological Survey Standards for Texas" in order to assess the significance of any cultural resources and their potential, if any, for nomination to National Register of Historic Places. The assessment consisted of a pedestrian survey and seven backhoe trenches strategically placed in each soil zone and topographic feature to test for buried cultural deposits. No evidence of prehistoric or historic sites was found on the property. No further archaeological investigations are recommended.

BACKGROUND

The Southton Park properties historically were farm lands which have since gone into fallow, and are now densely covered with invading vegetation characteristic of the prairie landscape. The property is on a prairie divide between San Antonio River and the Medina River south of and adjacent to Loop 410. The main segment is bordered on the northeast by Presa Road and on the west by Southton Road. There is an additional segment west of the Southton Tract that is bordered on the north by Nancy Carole Way.

The topography is relatively flat with the exception of a slight rise that extends across the property north-south. This feature marks the maximum elevation of the prairie divide. The flat topography is also indicated in the soil types. The soils are dominated by clayey prairie soils, namely Houston Black Clay terrace, (0-3 percent slope), Lewisville silty clay (1 to 3 percent slope), and San Antonio clay loam (1 to 3 percent slope; Taylor et al. 1991). A thin scatter of Uvalde gravels was noted on the slight slope on the west side of the property.

Dense growths of mesquite, huisache, yucca, and a thick cover of annuals and grasses made ground visibility poor in most of the area. Unusually heavy rains in the spring of 2007 were responsible for the dense growth of annuals and grass species characteristic of fallow prairies.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Regional Chronology

Based on archaeological research in the general region (e.g. Hester 2004) the earliest human presence was likely in the Paleoindian period, 11,500-8,800 years ago. Indicators of such occupation would be spear points of distinctive style and date, such as Clovis, Folsom, Golondrina, and Angostura (Turner and Hester 1993:50 ff.). In the

following Archaic period (8,800-1,500 years ago), the Native American population greatly expanded, and their sites are often found on terraces overlooking local streams. Use of limestone rock for cooking and for earth-oven techniques often result in major accumulations of fire-cracked rock fragments. Although "burned rock middens" typical of northern Bexar County have dropped out of the archaeological record in the present project area, it would be expected that sites from the long-lived Archaic would be indicated by burned rock fragments, diagnostic spear points and tools used in word-working or other tasks, and the flake debris resulting from tool-making (Turner and Hester 1993:50ff.). The Late Prehistoric period (A.D. 500-1700) is most clearly indicated by the occurrence of tiny arrow points, indicating the introduction of the bow and arrow into the area around A.D. 500-700. Later in this period, around A.D. 1250-1700, there was a regional emphasis on bison-hunting, and the material culture from this era is notable for the presence of pottery and other distinctive artifacts (Hester 2004). The Historic period is marked by the establishment of the Spanish Colonial missions early in the 18th century, and the arrival of Lipan Apache raiding parties by the 1720s, both processes serving to modify the Native American populations (Hindes 1995). Those native peoples who went into the San Antonio missions were joined by groups from south Texas and northeast Mexico. Early architecture, from the 18th and 19th centuries is often found in Bexar County, and in some cases farming and ranching complexes remain relatively intact from earlier eras (Thoms and Ahr 1995).

Nearby Sites

In the vicinity of the Southton Park property, relatively few archaeological sites have been documented. Most of the data for the area are derived from cultural resource surveys for various state and federal agencies (e.g., Shafer and Hester 2004a,b, 2005).. Notable examples include the San Antonio 201 Wastewater Treatment Project of the late 1970s (Fox 1977). There have also been surveys in the Braunig Lake area near the present project area. A transmission line survey for City Public Service was done by Galan (1998) near the V. H. Braunig Power Plant and extending west/southwest toward Blue Wing Lake. Seven prehistoric sites were reported, although several of these had been recorded by earlier surveys in the area, in a study funded by City Public Service (e.g., EH&A 1985). A good example is site 41BX686 (41=Texas, BX=Bexar County, 686= unique number of the site) was originally found in 1985. It is described as a "lithic scatter" in the uplands and may have been used as a "quarry" for stone procurement by ancient tool-makers.

No sites were previously documented for the area of the Southton Park tract or adjacent properties. A number of sites of varying dates are reported from the Mission Parkway along the San Antonio River to the west and northwest (Texas Archeological Site Atlas, Texas Historical Commission). Three other sites are about 2 km to the east-northeast, near the IH 37 corridor. Site 41BX705 is a lithic and burned rock scatter were recorded by A. J. McGraw for the Texas Department of Transportation (Texas Archeological Site Atlas).

41BX358 and 41BX358 are in the Salado Creek drainage. Both are lithic scatters, with chert (flint) flakes and bits of burned rock (Fox 1977).

SURVEY METHODS

Due to the heavy vegetation and overall poor ground visibility, we made the decision to employ a backhoe and front end loader. The front end loader blade was used to create paths and to scrape the ground surface along the way to examine for traces of cultural material. At strategic locations based on the soils and topography, seven backhoe trenches were excavated to confirm the absence of buried cultural material. These trenches are approximately located in Figure 2.

RESULTS

As noted above, seven backhoe tests were placed at various locations throughout the property. Each is described below and the approximate location is shown in Figure 2.

Test #1. This test reached a depth of 50 cm and was located immediately east of the borrow pit or reservoir south of the 1947 ranch style house (Fig.). The test showed the soils here to be disturbed probably by the excavation of the borrow pit or reservoir. No cultural material was observed. The GPS location was: 0555861E, 3243610 N.

Test #2. This test was south-southwest of #1 and below the slight ridge on which Test #3 was located. The soils were of the Lewisville series. The upper 40 cm was dark brown clay and a transition to lighter brown occurred at about 50 cm. No cultural material was observed. GPS location was: 0555784E/3243427N.

Test #3. This test was located near the southeast corner of the property on a slight rise. As the survey party examined the rise, we noted an abundance of limestone cobbles and a few Uvalde chert nodules. The test explained why the limestone was prevalent. The soils, still defined as the Lewisville series, were shallow, reached a depth of only ca. 25 cm; beneath that level Austin chalk was encountered. No cultural material was found. GPS location was: 0555721E/3243223N.

Test #4. Placed just off the transmission line that transects the property, this test was 60 cm deep and revealed dark brown clay loam of the Lewisville series. No cultural material was found. GPS location was 0555749E/3243502N.

Test #5. This test, also placed along the transmission line transect, was placed on a slight rise that extended along a north-south orientation through the property. The soils appeared to be more sandy and a lighter brown than those of the previous tests, but are

defined as belonging to the Houston Black clay series. The test reached a depth of 60 cm. No cultural material was found. GPS location was: 0555273E/3243485N.

Test #6. Placed south of the transmission line and along the crest of the slight rise tested in #5, this test also revealed a dark brown clay loam to a depth of ca. 50 cm. The soils here are described as belonging to the San Antonio clay loam series. No cultural material was found. GPS location was: 0555352E/3243398N.

Test #7. Soils in this 60 cm test placed north of the transmission line were a sandy clay loam of the Lewisville series. No cultural material was found. GPS location was: 0555625E/3243647N.

The 4.023 acre property west of and bordered by Southton Road and Nancy Carole Way was inspected by a pedestrian survey. The property slopes slightly toward the upper reaches of a creek that drains into Mitchell Lake. Recent historic trash was found on the surface of this area. Weathered stone pillars on Southton Road were once (Fig.) was the entry into an older homestead, the location of which is unknown but no traces of a historic structure were observed on the four-acre property.

SUMMARY AND ASSESSMENT

The Southton Park properties are located on the prairie divide between the San Antonio and Medina Rivers. A pedestrian survey of the main 80 acre tract was accompanied by a tractor scraping the heavily vegetated surface and seven backhoe trenches failed to find any trace or concentrations of historic or prehistoric cultural material. A pedestrian survey of the small tract west of Southton Road also failed to find any evidence of historic or prehistoric sites. No further archaeological work is recommended for the Southton Park properties.

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Southton Park Figures

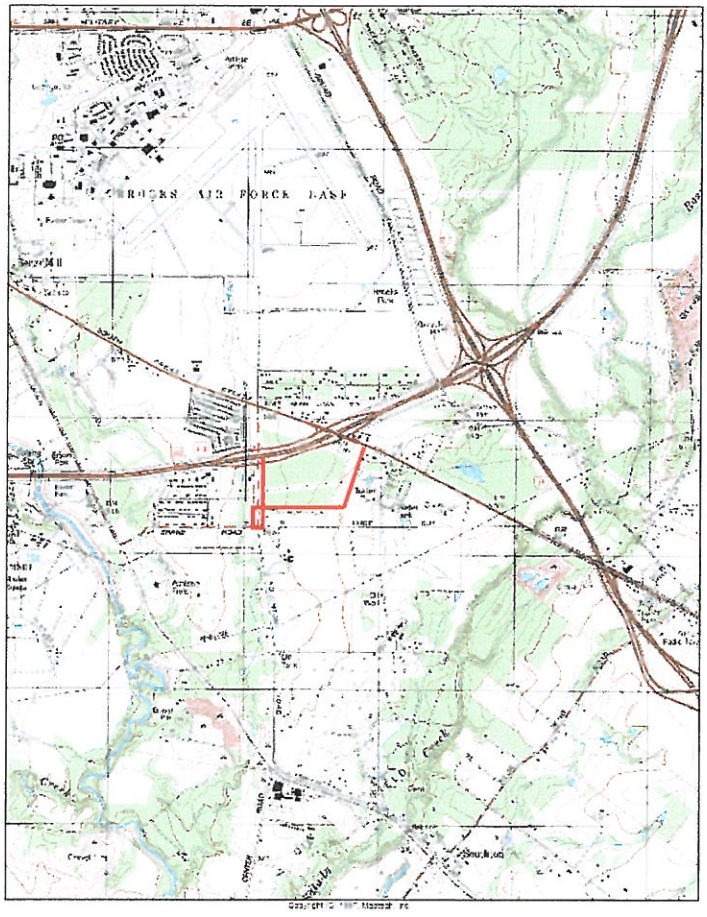

Figure 1. Topographic map showing the location of the Southton Park Properties on the prairie divide between Salado and Medina River drainages.

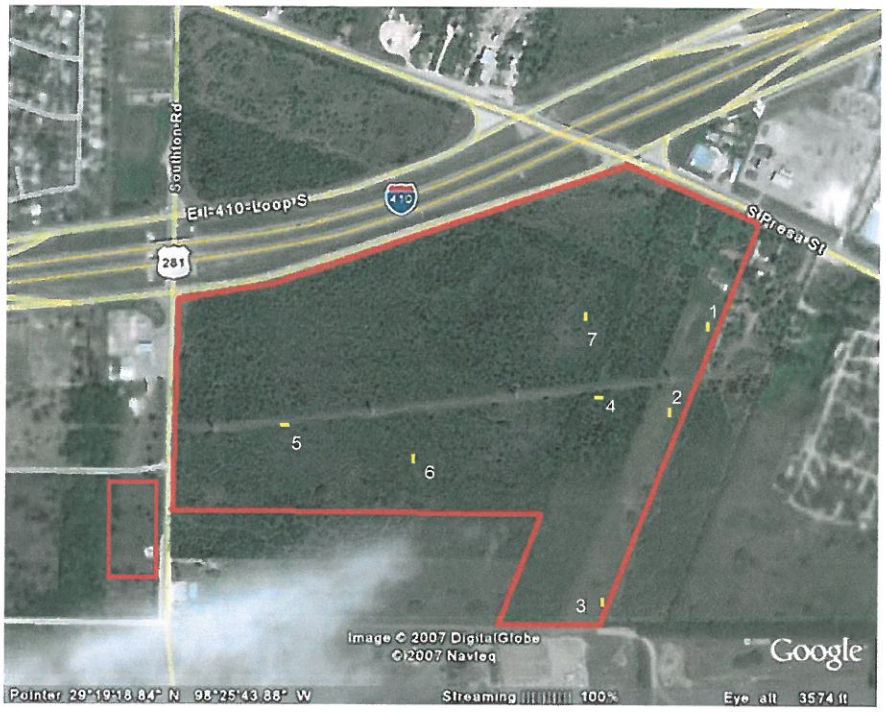

Figure 2. Aerial perspective of the Southton Park properties showing the locations of the seven backhoe trenches.

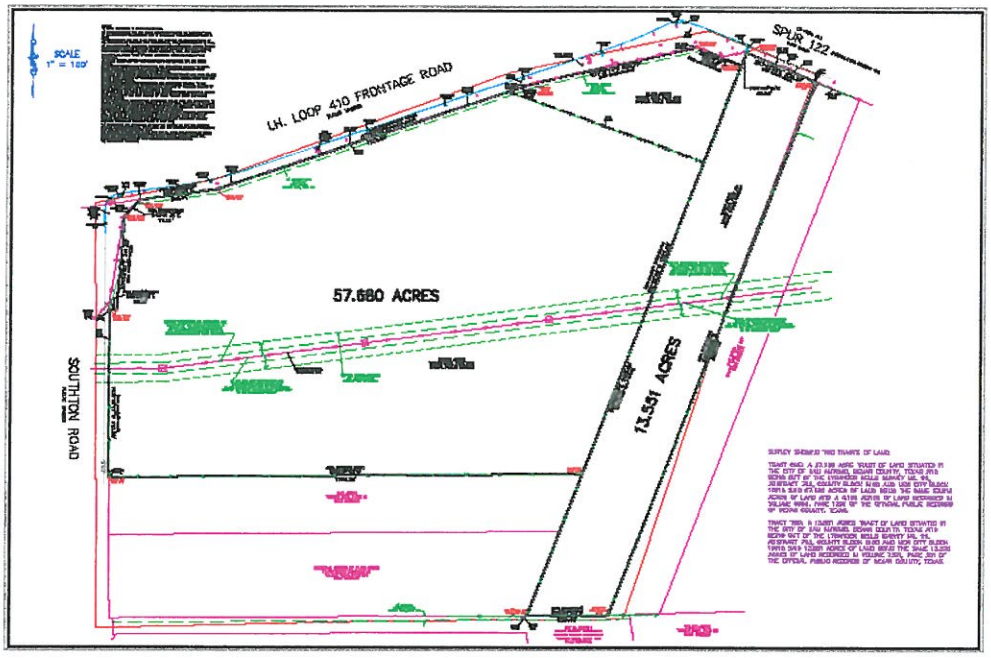

Figure 3. The plat for the 80 acre portion of the Southton Property

Figure 4. View of the Southton Park survey tract looking east near southern boundary.

Figure 5. View of the heavily vegetation conditions on the Southton Park tract near Test #6.

Figure 6. Test #2 showing Lewisville series dark clay loam soils.

Figure 7. Test #3 showing the bedrock Austin chalk below a mantle of San Antonio series brown clay loam.

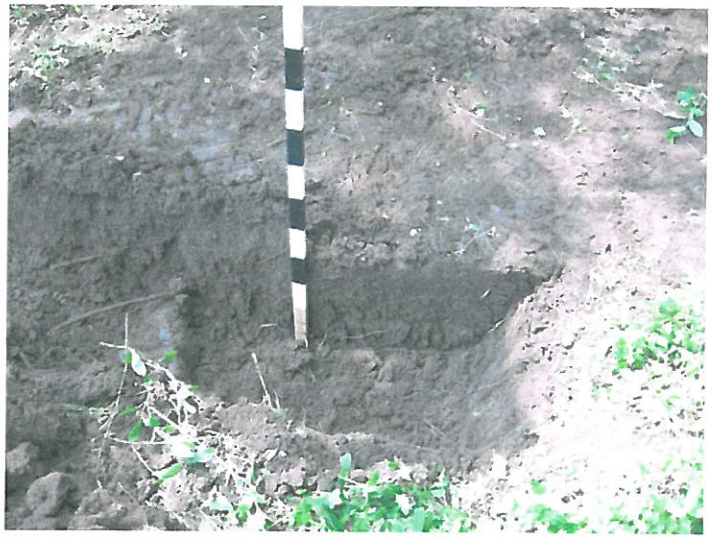

Figure 8. Test #5 showing dark brown Houstin Black clay loam.

Figure 9. Test #7 revealing the light brown San Antonio clay loam.

Figure 10. Front view of the 1947 vintage ranch-style house recently vacated on the Southton Park property.

Figure 11. Back view of the 1947 vintage ranch-style home on the Southton Park property.